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1961/03/15

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

March 15, 1961

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MEMORANDUM FOR

THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Meeting on Cuba, 4:00 PM, March 15, 1961

CIA will present a revised plan for the Cuban operation. They have done a remarkable job of reframing the landing plan so as to make it unspectacular and quiet, and plausibly Cuban in its essentials.

The one major problem which remains is the air battle. I think there is unanimous agreement that at some stage the Castro Air Force must be removed. It is a very sketchy force, in very poor shape at the present, and Colonel Hawkins (Bissell's military brain) thinks it can be removed by six to eight simultaneous sorties of B-26s. These will be undertaken by Cuban pilots in planes with Cuban Air Force markings. This is the only really noisy enterprise that remains.

My own belief is that this air battle has to come sooner or later, and that the longer we put it off, the harder it will be. Castro's Air Force is currently his Achilles' heel, but he is making drastic efforts to strengthen it with Russian planes and Russian-trained pilots.

Even the revised landing plan depends strongly upon prompt action against Castro's air. The question in my mind is whether we cannot solve this problem by having the air strike come some little time before the invasion. A group of patriotic airplanes flying from Nicaraguan bases might knock out Castro's Air Force in a single day without anyone knowing (for some time) where they came from, and with nothing to prove that it was not an interior rebellion by the Cuban Air Force, which has been of very doubtful loyalty in the past; the pilots will in fact be members of the Cuban Air Force who went into the opposition some time ago. Then the invasion could come as a separate enterprise, and neither the air strike nor

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- 2 -

the quiet landing of patriots would in itself give Castro anything to take to the United Nations.

I have been a skeptic about Bissell's operation, but now I think we are on the edge of a good answer. I also think that Bissell and Hawkins have done an honorable job of meeting the proper criticisms and cautions of the Department of State.

McGeorge Bundy